REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

This is a response to the Office Action of March 30, 2004. The disclosure was objected to due to certain informalities. The applicants would like to thank Examiner Singh for the careful review of the specification and pointing our inadvertent typographical errors. The applicants amended the specification to overcome the objections and believe that the disclosure is now in order.

Claims 1 – 3, and 5 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Nunley. Having carefully considered Examiner's comments, the applicant made certain amendments in Claim 1 and point out the differences between the cited prior art and the instant claims. In particular, the applicants stressed a unique design of the offshore structure of the present invention, wherein the bottom portion of the hull is configured to nest within the central opening of the mat when the structure is in transit. This feature is fully illustrated in Figs. 1, 3 and 4. The advantage of this design is that the buoyancy lost from the central opening of the mat is taken up by the hull bottom allowing the structure to float carrying the mat and the supporting legs (see page 4, lines 13 – 17).

In contrast, Nunley discloses a mat 1 with a large cutout 2 and a platform 4, which has greater port-starboard dimensions than the cutout 2. As a result the platform 4 rests on top of the mat 1 when the rig is in transit (See, Fig. 1, 3 and 4), not within the mat cutout.

The applicants further wish to bring Examiner's attention to the disclosure of Nunley relating to the purpose of that invention – converting a jack-up rig to a floating platform by raising the mat, permanently joining the mat with the platform and then removing the legs (Col. 2, lines 31 – 41). To relieve suction during raising of the mat, Nunley suggests closing the cutout 3 by metal plates welded to the bottom and top of the mat around a cutout 3 (col. 3, lines 43-55). Nunley is silent on the buoyancy of the mat when the mat is lowered to the seabed.

In contrast, original Claim 1 of the instant application specifically pointed_out a unique feature of the instant mat design, wherein the mat has sufficient buoyancy to be lowered to the seabed without assistance of a ballasting means. Such structure is not shown, disclosed or suggested by Nunley.

Claims 4 and 6 – 10 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Nunley in view of Diamond et al. The applicants amended Claims 4 and 6 to better point out some of the unique features of the instant invention relating to the configuration of the hull bottom portion and the size and shape of the central opening formed in the hull, which allows the bottom portion to be entirely nested within the central opening of the mat.

The discussion on the limitations of the disclosure of Nunley presented above is incorporated in full herein. Diamond et al's patent was cited for a proposition that the hull bottom portion is shaped to extend into the central opening in a mat.

The applicants respectfully disagree and submit that the V-shaped base portion 18 of Diamond consisting of two diverging members can hardly be classified as a "mat" in a conventional sense. The base portion 18 forms a part of the transparent hull section (col. 3, lines 6 – 10); it has controlled buoyancy. Even in transit (Figs. 2 and 5), the portion 26 of the upper portion of the hull 16 extends between the jack houses 28, never reaching a "nesting" relationship within the opening formed between the V-shaped base portion as claimed in the instant invention.

Additionally, the applicants bring Examiner's attention to the disclosure of Diamond et al. discussing lowering of the hull section 16 by "reducing buoyancy until the lower face of the base portion 18 is securely supported on the marine bottom 30" (col. 4, lines 19 – 23, 33 – 38, 42 – 47).

This feature of the cited patent disclosure is in contrast to the claims of the instant application specifically pointing out that the mat has sufficient buoyancy to be lowered to the seabed without assistance of a ballasting means.

The applicants also added claims 11 and 12, which further stress the innovative concepts of the instant invention. It is believed that no fee is required for presentation of extra claims. The claims do not introduce any new matter and full support for the claims is present in the specification and drawings as originally filed.

In view of the amendments and arguments presented above, it is believed that Claims 1 – 12 are in condition for allowance and issuance of an early Notice of Allowance is respectfully requested. Should the Examiner feel that a telephone conference would advance resolution of any issues, which might remain in the case, he is invited to call the undersigned at the telephone number listed below.

Respectfully submitted,

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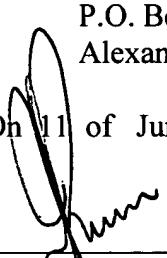

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[0001] The present invention relates to a mat supported jack-up platform that can be used for drilling and production operations offshore.

[0009] In the preferred embodiments of the present invention, the jack-up rig has a buoyant hull and a plurality of supporting legs that extend above the hull deck when the rig is in transit. A hollow mat is secured to the bottom of the legs; the ~~hull~~ mat has a central opening that accommodates the bottom portion of the hull. The mat with a large central opening has sufficient buoyancy to facilitate floating of the hull while the rig is towed and lowering of the mat to the seabed without assistance of conventional ballasting means.

[0013] Figure 3 is a schematic side view of the mat supported rig of the present invention, with the mat embedded in the seabed.